

7
FREE

STRICTURES

ON

"An ADDRESS to CANDID and SERIOUS MEN."

K

TENDING TO REFUTE THE ARGUMENTS BROUGHT FORWARD IN

THAT PAMPHLET IN FAVOUR OF THE RESTORATION

OF ALL LAPSED INTELLIGENCES,

BY SOME

FRIENDS OF REVELATION.

LONDON.

1799.

SOLD BY MARTHA GURNEY, BOOKSELLER, No. 128, HOLBORN-HILL.

PRICE SIX-PENCE.

1817

Well hast thou Strictures on ^{the} Calm

STRICTURES

(address

To Serious Men (by some of Satan's race)

They can't by Scripture & by truth

maintain

The limited duration of Hell flame

'Tis true its popular & will be so

Till Christ shall lay the

Sm Dragon low



BY JOHN

FRYERS OF NEW BATHON.

LONDON.

1791.

SOLD BY MARTIN GURNEY, BOOKSELLER, NO. 12, HOLBORN HILL.

PRICE 10 SHILLINGS

FREE STRICTURES

"An Address to Candid and Serious Men,"

8c.

GENTLEMEN,

THINKING ourselves to be candid and serious men, and therefore interested in the purport of your address, we read it with attention, and shall now deliver our opinion of its contents with the same freedom which you have taken in your animadversions on the sentiments of others.

What first particularly attracted our notice was, the various and contradictory epithets you apply to the same persons and characters. In the title page you call yourselves "Friends of mankind." But as the avowed object of your address was to prove "the final recovery of ALL GOD'S CREATURES to holiness and happiness," among whom the devils are included, would it not have been still more appropriate to have called yourselves *the friends of men and devils?*

The *candid* and *serious* to whom your piece is particularly addressed, you afterwards call your "dear fellow Christians," and then divide them into three classes, "Calvinists, Arminians, and Deists." The two former you address under the very endearing appellation of "brethren;" yet you charge them with holding "doctrines contrary to reason, revelation, and the attributes of Deity." We are, therefore, at a loss to conceive wherein the brotherhood consists, except it be in the particulars specified. The Deists you treat with much greater lenity and respect than you do even your brethren; these you

"rather pity than condemn," as you think your *brethren* the *Calvinists* and *Arminians* have been the occasion, if not the sole cause of their infidelity.

In all this, we conceive, there is a manifest solecism, if not much palpable contradiction. Is it consistent conduct in those who would be thought genuine and zealous Christians, to acknowledge those to be their *brethren*, and *dear fellow Christians*, whose leading and fundamental sentiments are "contrary both to reason, revelation, and the attributes of God?" What besides a belief of the truth is the bond of union among Christians? Admitting the sincerity of your professions of brotherly attachment, it appears that your fraternity is very differently constituted to that of the immediate followers of Christ, amongst whom the love of the truth was the only centre of amity: while yours is made up of "friends to mankind," and "enemies to reason, to revelation, and to God." This is your own statement.

That you should, in the exordium to your address, lament, in such pathetic language, the increase of error; and caution your readers against the attacks of infidelity; and yet acknowledge the *Deists* to be really *candid* and *serious* men, is to us paradoxical in the extreme. What other qualities than these are necessary for the investigation of truth? And do you verily believe the Scriptures to be so ambiguous, as to elude the search of rational creatures, in the pursuit of knowledge, who are truly serious and candid? For ourselves, we most firmly believe, that every important truth is stated in the Scriptures with so much perspicuity and strength of evidence, as to leave without excuse the man who reads them, and refuses his assent to their interesting contents. To suppose the contrary is to impeach both the wisdom and goodness of God; and to exculpate every *Deist* from the charge of guilt. Such an insinuation has, we think, as great a tendency to establish *Deism* as any proposition or sentiment whatever. And, when coming from professed friends of revelation, it will no doubt be regarded as a concession altogether subversive of the cause they undertake to defend.

When you particularly address the *Deist*, you appeal to *reason*, and the ideas he is supposed to entertain of the divine attri-

attributes. We admit that reason is sufficient to discover the necessity there is of a revelation from God, respecting those points which are above all others interesting to mankind. And we contend, that reason will lead a man to conclude, if ever such a revelation be granted, that it will be every way adequate to the ends proposed; and at the same time be attended with every requisite demonstration of its divine original. Consequently to suggest that the Bible we now have in our possession is deficient in exhibiting these proofs of its divinity, so that an intelligent man may read it with *seriousness* and *candour*, and yet remain an unbeliever in the truths it contains, is either to contradict reason itself, or to give up the cause into the hands of infidels.

What you advance on the ground of the divine attributes, is altogether fallacious, because you are reasoning from premises of which you have no competent idea; and are under the necessity of taking certain things for granted which ought first to be proved. That degree of *reason* which is capable of discovering the existence of a Divine Being, is equally sufficient to convince us that this Being is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness: but how these perfections will be manifested, no man upon earth, or angel in heaven, knows any more than a stock or a stone, independent of existing facts, or of a divine revelation. Admit that the angels existed prior to the creation of this world, is it possible to imagine that they could, by the power of ratiocination only, foresee that God would create such a system as the present? Could they, or could man after his fall, have discovered the necessity of the divine incarnation; or have inferred from what they knew of the divine attributes, that such an event would take place? To suppose this, or any thing of this nature possible, would be to deny the necessity of a divine revelation, and to contradict what the God of truth has positively asserted. So what relates to the future manifestations of divine goodness, any farther than the Scriptures make it evident, must remain a profound secret to every living man.

You argue, "that as God is the first cause of all, so he *should* seek the happiness of all his creatures, and deal justly with them; and we might ask, where would be his justice in punish-

punishing a creature surrounded with infirmities, and exposed to temptations as man is, endlessly, for the transgressions of a few years?" Here you insinuate, that as God made us, he *ought* also to make us happy, whether we will or not. And if he do not, you shew a strong inclination to represent him as not doing his duty. For you ask, "Where will be his justice?" which implies that in that case he will be a hideous, detestable monster! You likewise extenuate sin to a mere peccadillo, almost undeserving of any punishment whatever. First, in extenuation of man's guilt, you urge the *infirmities* of his nature, by which you seem to think him almost totally incapable of performing his duty. Secondly, the numerous temptations to which he is constantly exposed, still increasing the difficulty, if not rendering his obedience to the divine will absolutely impossible. Lastly, that the time allotted him in this life is so short, he has neither opportunity of cultivating virtuous principles, nor of committing many errors. If this be a just representation of the state of man in this world, we may safely conclude, that instead of his being punished to eternity for his present crimes, he will not be punished at all; as we are assured the just God doth not require from his creatures any thing beyond the abilities bestowed, or the opportunities afforded. Especially as his goodness and mercy are indisputably infinite, we may reasonably expect he will candidly overlook and pardon a few inconsiderable errors, if indeed there be any thing to pardon, which, upon your hypothesis, is at least extremely doubtful. And we see, according to this statement, no great necessity for the sufferings and death of Christ. That a God of unbounded munificence should take pleasure in bruising his only begotten Son, and putting him to grief, for the sins of mankind, which are supposed to be of so trivial a nature, and which their own sufferings would in a short time completely expiate, is, in our conception of things, neither a just nor an honourable representation of his character.

This opinion, we think, cancels all the high obligations of love and gratitude which the Christian has been supposed to be under to the Lord Jesus for the unsearchable riches of his grace in the work of redemption; for the sinner in a short

time

time could have performed the same work himself, that is, have suffered the full demerit of his own sins.

This view of man's condition in the present life, and of the magnitude of his guilt, makes repentance a work of supererogation, or at least reduces it to a mere ceremony; for who would think it expedient to make a confession of sin with deep contrition, who imagines he was so circumstanced, that his errors have been the almost unavoidable consequence of the situation in which he was placed by the Divine Being? Men are already sufficiently prone to palliate their crimes, and need no such plea as this doctrine furnishes to justify their evil practices.

If "God," as you affirm, "should seek the happiness of all his creatures, and his power will accomplish what his wisdom planned, and his goodness willed," we ask, how it came to pass that there should be so much evil and misery in the world, as there confessedly is? Is it for the happiness of mankind that they should be both wicked and miserable? Or has not God yet begun to seek the happiness of his creatures? It becomes you, Gentlemen, to develop this mystery; and to shew how the fall of man, the wickedness of the *Antediluvians*, of the *Canaanites*, of the *Jews*, &c. &c. together with the dreadful judgments inflicted on them, harmonize with your system. Has God hitherto accomplished by his power whatever his wisdom planned, or his goodness willed? If this hath been the case, it will follow that God never did as yet will the holiness or happiness of all his creatures, as they have generally from the beginning been both very wicked and very miserable. And if it hath not been yet the case, that the power of God has co-operated with his will effectually to prevent the entrance of sin, and its consequent evils into the world, how does it appear, from a consideration of the divine attributes only, as they have been already exercised in the government of the world, that his power will finally accomplish what his goodness wills respecting the happiness of all his creatures? Why not then prevent their being miserable at all? As God is infinitely good and infinitely powerful, he must be too good to will the existence of sin, and too powerful not to be able to prevent it; must we therefore infer that
there

there never was either physical or moral evil in the world? This would be to contradict the experience of all ages. Yet it is precisely your own argument. Had Adam, prior to his offence, entertained the same ideas of the divine attributes, and of their operation in the government of the universe, as you do, he would no doubt have concluded that he should never experience a reverse in his situation; but that the power of God would be employed to preserve him from every possible evil. Yet had he encouraged such a hope, we know from the event that he would have been disappointed. Satan, indeed, appears to have adopted this argument in his reasoning with Eve, and by this it was that he too well succeeded. He suggests that they had totally mistaken the meaning of what God had spoken concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He argues from the wisdom of God, that he certainly knew the excellent properties the fruit possessed, and the happy consequences that would ensue from their eating it; he throws out hints concerning the goodness of God; and that all things being created for the pleasure and happiness of man, it could not comport with reason that he should be precluded the enjoyment of a tree possessed of such excellent qualities; in a word, a tree that *was good for food, and a tree to be desired to make one wise*. Consequently that every idea they ought to form of the divine attributes, forbade them to suppose that the fruit of this tree should be prohibited. Believing this doctrine in opposition to what God had expressly asserted, they ventured to eat, and thereby brought ruin and misery on themselves, and on all their posterity.

To argue from the divine perfections by mere inference, is indeed a very convenient way of proving an assertion which is altogether unsupported by positive evidence. In this case a man has only to take it for granted that he has an adequate idea of all the divine attributes; then to say how a Being possessed of such attributes "*should*" conduct himself towards his creatures; and it will follow, that in this very manner, and in no other, God will and must of necessity conduct himself towards all the works of his hands. But if the major proposition should prove illusory and unfounded, the argument is of no force. In the present instance the assumption is too great

for a finite understanding, and the conclusion therefore necessarily falls to the ground, because even *the foolishness of God is wiser than men*. And as *the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts*. Man is but of yesterday and knows nothing. It becomes him, therefore, to think and to speak of God with at least some degree of modesty and reverence. He is a Being of ineffable glory and perfection; and if he were to be severe to mark our innumerable offences, what flesh could stand before him, or answer for one among a thousand?

We shall only remark further on this part of the subject, that those who believe the Scriptures do most assuredly believe in the immensity of the divine goodness, as extended to all his creatures, in that way which shall redound most to the honour of all his infinite perfections; and so as not to leave the minutest stain upon his character, or the remotest cause of complaint either of injustice, or of unkindness in his conduct to a single individual; but, on the contrary, if rational beings had a just sense of their obligations, they would see abundant cause to love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Yet his people dare not dispute with him about the propriety of what he has revealed, but with the disposition of little children receive his testimony, and, with confidence in his veracity, wait the issue.

In addition to the arguments you deduce from reason and the divine attributes, you quote certain passages from the inspired writings, which you presume are favourable to your hypothesis. The propriety of which quotations, for the purpose alledged, we shall now consider. But we beg leave to premise, that the only safe and certain way of explaining any passage in the Old Testament, which is quoted and explained in the New, is to consult, first of all, what the New Testament writers have said concerning it, and then to abide by their interpretation, as the only just and proper one; remembering that they had the Divine Spirit to lead them into all truth; consequently, that every explanation which is in substance and meaning different from that which they have given, is to be rejected as false. We are confident of the propriety of this rule, and of the absolute necessity of attending to it.

The first passage you have cited is Gen. 28. v. 14. "And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south, and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed;" which we find also quoted and explained by the Apostle, Gal. 3. v. 8—26. There it is referred to Christ, and supposed to receive its accomplishment in all those who believe the gospel; "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Gal. 3. v. 9. and that the rest of mankind are not interested in that promise, but remain under the curse; "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." v. 10. that the blessing of Abraham comes upon all Gentile believers, and consists in their receiving the spirit of adoption; "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." v. 14, 22, 26.—This is then the import and meaning of that promise made to Abraham at different times, and repeated to Isaac and Jacob; "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Gen. 12. v. 3. "Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." Gen. 18. v. 18. "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." Gen. 22. v. 18. "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven; and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen. 26. v. 4. "And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Gen. 28. v. 14.—according to the explanation given of it by an inspired writer;

which we are fully prepared to receive as the only just and true one, and consequently to reject yours as spurious.

We have also the same objection to your next quotation; "And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah 25, v. 7, 8.—which we find explained 1 Cor. 15, v. 54, "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." The Apostle, it seems, understood the prophecy to relate to the resurrection, and to have its accomplishment in that event. Upon his authority we receive this as the true meaning, and reject your comment as a manifest perversion of the text.

You next cite for the same purpose Isaiah 45, v. 23, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." This is explained in Rom. 14, v. 11, "For it is written, as I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." And Philip. 2, v. 10, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." In the first passage it is expressly applied to the time of the universal judgment; and the latter, to make the Apostle a consistent writer, must be understood in the same manner.

Your quotations from the New Testament are equally irrelevant and inappropriate. You quote the declaration of the angel, recorded Luke 2, v. 10, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." which cannot, however, be fairly construed into a promise, or even an indication, that all mankind, much less all the infernal spirits, shall be finally saved from sin and misery. According to your hypothesis, you had to prove that devils, as well as unbelievers of the human race, would in the end be liberated from the prison of hell.

In pursuance of this design you first quoted the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed "all the nations of the earth should be blessed," as if you thought the devils to be one of those nations; and now you adduce, for the same purpose, the words of the angel, that the important event he had to announce, would be "good tidings of great joy to all people," as if the devils were included; although we are assured our Lord took not upon him the nature of angels. How then could the birth of the Messiah be a propitious event with regard to them? We know, at the time, the devils did not so consider it; for they would have prevented it if possible, because they thought that he came only to torment them. Nor, indeed, can the salvation of the whole human race, in the final issue of events, be fairly inferred from the declaration of the angel to the shepherds. If Christ came to redeem mankind without exception, from the effects of the first transgression which brought death, and all its concomitant evils, into the world:—"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." Gen. 3. v. 15.—"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 1. Cor. 15. v. 22.—"Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Rom. 5. v. 18.—If salvation from personal iniquities, and the punishment they merit, be held out indiscriminately to mankind, through faith in the virtue of Christ's vicarious death and resurrection, and some wilfully reject the heavenly message, and chuse rather to perish in their sins, than to be indebted to the sovereignty of divine grace for their recovery, is not the gospel nevertheless glad tidings in itself, as well as in the direction which it bears even to those very persons who reject it?—If a general amnesty be proclaimed to an army of rebels, on condition of their returning to their allegiance, and some of them yet persist in their unreasonable opposition, and perish in their obstinacy, was not the proclamation an act of clemency and good news to every traitor? Surely the goodness of a prince is not diminished

in proportion as it is despised. The doctrine is absurd in the extreme.

The 1. Tim. 2. v. 1-5. is likewise quoted as affording a direct proof of universal salvation: ("I exhort therefore that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.") We conceive that nothing was farther from the Apostle's design. He is there recommending prayer and thanksgiving for all ranks and conditions of men; and for this purpose (as he himself expresses it) *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*. But what, in reason and good sense, has the deliverance out of hell of wicked men and devils to do with the saints living quietly and peaceably in this life? And though it is there said that God *will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*, it cannot intend that this is the absolute unfrustrable will of God. We know it is the will of God that all men should keep the moral law; but we also know this is not the case. It is the will of God that all who hear the gospel should receive it; but it is far otherwise in fact. Who will affirm that the will of God is never in any instance frustrated? To say this would be tacitly charging God with all the wickedness and misery which exists in the world. Indeed it is evident that the salvation intended in the text now recited, is that salvation which comes through the knowledge of the truth; for so it is expressed. Consequently, it can have no relation whatever to an universal restoration, which you imagine will be effected by means of hell torments. Take the words in their most absolute and unlimited sense, they, even then, fall short of the purpose for which they were quoted, the universal restoration of all lapsed intelligences; for *men* only are specifically mentioned; and nothing is said, either directly or indirectly, concerning apostate *angels*. And as the will of God respecting the salvation of all men is the alledged reason why we are to pray

pray for all; if the devils also will be saved, the same reason
 will equally apply to them also, and by a parity of argument,
 prayers, supplications, and giving of thanks should be made for
 the prince of devils, and all his infernal associates. But we
 have not heard, whether the advocates for universal salvation,
 are perfectly consistent in this matter. In fine, we are con-
 fidently persuaded that your interpretation of this passage is al-
 together foreign to its genuine and obvious meaning. Your
 next passage is 1 Tim. 4: vi. 10. where we are informed
 that *God is the Saviour of all men, but especially of those that believe.* To avoid a palpable absurdity, some of your brethren
 have shrewdly observed that *restoration* and *salvation* are dis-
 tinct things; that the latter term is never employed by the in-
 spired writers to express the idea attached to the former. This
 distinction is founded in truth. But you have confounded them
 throughout your address. *Salvation*, in Scripture, is applied
 only to conscious intelligent beings; to denote their deliver-
 ance from actual sin, and the guilt thereby contracted. *Restora-
 tion* is used only when speaking of those creatures who suffer
 through the offence of man, but are themselves incapable of
 moral obligations. Accordingly we read of all things being
 restored (Matt. 17: 9. 11.) and of the times of restitution of all
 things (Acts 3. v. 21.) Notwithstanding the reason of this dis-
 tinction is obvious, your brethren just alluded to have in-
 vented another, for which we can discover no reason, except
 that which arises out of the absurdity of the system itself. See
 observations at the end of Scarlett's translation of the New
 Testament under the word *Restore*, &c. where we have the
 following remarkable words: *For say God our Saviour*
willeth that all men should be saved, to contrary to the senti-
ments of the Apostle, who well knew that all men would not
be saved; for in Col. 3. vs. 6. he says, The wrath of God is coming
on the children of disobedience; therefore could not have ad-
vised Timothy to pray for what he himself never could be.
 Accordingly the verse in question is rendered, in this transla-
 tion, For to this end we both labour and suffer reproach be-
 cause we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all
 men, especially of the faithful. But that all men will not be
 saved; and yet that all men will certainly be made holy and
 happy,

happy is what we cannot comprehend. We, therefore, leave the solution of this problem to those adepts in metaphysical disquisition, who are able to demonstrate that two things may be in all respects the same, and yet specifically different from each other.

The word *salvation* does not always signify deliverance from sin, and future misery. It sometimes means deliverance from temporal evils. "And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." Exod. 14. v. 13.—"It is he that giveth salvation unto kings; who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword." Psalm 144. v. 10.—"Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed," Hab. 3. v. 13.—"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." James 5. v. 15. and in many other places. That this is the meaning of the word in 1. Tim. 4. v. 10, there can be no doubt. It is spoken of the present time, "God is." And a preserving providence is extended to all mankind, but especially to them that believe. This passage, therefore, has no reference whatever to the subject in question.

You now direct our attention to Eph. 1. v. 10. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him," and Col. 1. v. 20. "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."—Here we have to enquire what is intended by the *dispensation of the fulness of times*; and if we turn to Gal. 4. v. 4. we shall find it explained of the dispensation of grace by the appearing of Christ. *When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. So then the dispensation of the fulness of times, means the dispensation of light, grace, and truth under the gospel, whereby all the outlines of former types and prophecies are completely filled up; for Christ is the fulness and perfection of all; and it is in him, that all*

things, both in heaven and in earth, are now gathered together, *as under one head. He is Lord of all.* Acts. x. v. 36. *Head over all things, and all things are put under his feet.* Eph. i. v. 22. He cannot ascend higher in dignity or glory; for he is in the midst of the throne, *Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.* Eph. i. v. 21. This, no doubt, is the reconciliation intended; Col. i. v. 20. for the Apostle is there describing the high dignity, and universal dominion, to which the Son of God is now exalted. According to your interpretation of the text, how shall we understand the word *reconciliation*, as it applies to things in *heaven*? Do the holy angels, or the spirits of just men made perfect, need any such reconciliation as that for which you contend? And as the text mentions nothing of things in *hell*, how can you, with any degree of propriety, accommodate it to your hypothesis? It is said of Elias (Matt. 17. v. 11.) *He shall first come and restore all things:* which we are taught (v. 13.) to understand of John the Baptist. Of Christ it is said, *Whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things.* (Acts 3. v. 21.) which will, therefore, take place at his second advent, and consequently prior to the universal judgment. From these passages, then, you can derive no advantage in support of your system. One thing only is evident; namely, that you have been long anxiously in quest of witnesses to substantiate your doctrine, and can find none.

You proceed to obviate what you call *the grand objection* to your doctrine, which is, *the word everlasting being applied to the punishment of the wicked.* You attempt to do this by observing, that *the same word is applied in our translation, to things that have had an end;* and you give some instances. Now we shall not, for the present, controvert this statement, though it has been controverted, and we think, with success. But we ask, why you have chosen to refer only to the Old Testament, which you know was not written in the same language as the New? Besides which, it was written under a typical dispensation; so that as those words respected the type, they could not signify absolute eternity; but consider them as ultimately pointing to the thing signified:

signified: they could intend nothing less. This is especially the case in all the instances you have mentioned. The priesthood of Aaron, in the spirit and intention of it, was, in the strictest sense of the word, *everlasting*; for it was a figure of the priesthood of the Son of God. "But Christ, being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Heb. 9. v. 11, 12. This observation applies to every other typical institute, and figurative adumbration, all of which, for the same reason, may be truly said to be *everlasting*. So the inhabitants of Sodom, &c. are said to be *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*; both because the fire by which they were consumed, was an emblem of the fire of hell; and because they did then enter into that awful state *where the worm never dieth, and where the fire shall never be quenched*.

But yet, admitting it could be proved that the word translated *everlasting*, *eternal*, *for ever and ever*, &c. does sometimes, even in the New Testament, signify a period of limited duration, does it thence follow that it never is used to denote *endless* existence? As well might you argue, that because creatures are sometimes called *gods*, therefore that term is never used to express *absolute divinity*. You say, "The word cannot in its own nature mean endless, but an age, or *hidden* period." If so, we have no revelation concerning the endless duration of future glory; for this is uniformly expressed by the same terms, which are used in reference to the punishment of the wicked, and sometimes in the same sentence, denoting an exact contrast. The word which the inspired writers constantly use to express as well the duration of certain states and conditions of creatures, as the permanency of the divine perfections, and the dispensations both of grace and of punitive justice, occurs in the New Testament no less than one hundred and ninety-nine times. To say then that this word is "in its own nature" vague and equivocal, tends to sap the foundation of all confidence in the divine testimony, and to render the Scriptures of equal insignificance with blank paper.

Words are intended to express ideas; but if the meaning of a word be indeterminate, the use of it can be only calculated to deceive or to perplex. And to impute such a practice to the Apostles (not to say to the Holy Spirit by whom they were inspired), is too horrid to be contemplated without the utmost indignation. The present encrease of Deism is deeply lamented by every sincere friend to revelation; but nothing can contribute so effectually to the propagation of deistical sentiments, as insinuations from the professed advocates of divine truth, of imperfection and ambiguity in the inspired writings; and an obscurity in what relates to the everlasting state of saints and sinners, as it is a leading and fundamental doctrine in the evangelical system, would be sufficient, if it could be proved, to sink the reputation, and destroy the validity of the Scriptures for ever. Whatever relates to the character or kingdom of the Son of God, is described by the epithet (*æonian*) everlasting, or eternal; and at the same time, without any mark of distinction, to denote the duration of hell torments. Now, if it be, *in its own nature*, so equivocal and ambiguous as you insinuate, what must we think of the wisdom or the integrity of those writers, who uniformly made use of it on subjects of such infinite moment; when, if at any time, as good writers and as honest men, they should have been the most scrupulously accurate and explicit? If this be a fair specimen of divine wisdom and divine goodness, as much as we deplore the increase of infidelity, we think the Deists are perfectly justified in the rejection of a book, which either is altogether unintelligible, or else more eminently calculated to deceive, than any other book that ever was obtruded upon mankind.

For ourselves we firmly believe, that of the seventy-one times the Greek adjective (*æonian*) translated *everlasting*, *eternal*, &c. &c. occurs in the New Testament, it never once means any other than *endless*, or *never-ending*. In answer to this, the words of Paul to Philemon, respecting Onesimus, are quoted with confidence: "*For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.*" (v. 15.) But from the words which immediately follow, it is evident the Apostle had respect, not to the civil connection which had formerly subsisted, but to their union in spirit, as brethren in

faith, which death itself could not dissolve. So that, even in this place, the word means nothing less than *endless* duration.

What we have more particularly to complain of, is, that you should take away the key of knowledge from the common people, and give that as a revelation from God, which neither they nor yourselves can comprehend. You have expell'd from the New Testament the plain English phrases *eternal*, *everlasting*, *for ever*, *world without end*, &c. &c. and you have supplied their place with a word from a dead language, of which they know nothing; and of the meaning of which you know as little. For you cannot translate it, because, by your account, it has no meaning; or else means every thing, or nothing, just as fancy may dictate. Hence we have, for divine truth, such uncouth, unintelligible phrases as the following: *æonian* God, *æonian* gospel, *æonian* life, *æonian* consolation, *æonian* covenant, *æonian* punishment; that Christ shall reign *æonianly*, &c. &c. which can convey no instruction to any living man, learned or unlearned: and you might as well have substituted the cabalistic word *abracadabra*. It is hard, gentlemen, extremely hard, that nine hundred and ninety-nine individuals out of a thousand, at least, should be thus tantalized, by having the Bible put into their hands, and by being told it is a revelation from God, concerning matters of infinite moment, and every way calculated to make them supremely happy, if they receive it in its true light; when, looking into this sacred volume for the important information promised, they there read of an *æonian* God, who regards his people with an *æonian* love, has made with them in Christ an *æonian* covenant, provided for them an *æonian* salvation, together with an *æonian* righteousness, through which they shall now experience *æonian* consolation, and finally possess *æonian* life, in an *æonian* kingdom; but that if they reject and despise all this, they will be compelled to suffer *æonian* punishment. In this case, how great their disappointment and mortification! They apply to you for an explanation of the word *æonian*, upon the meaning of which the true import of every sentence depends. You tell them it means, "an age, or hidden period;" and might be translated "*agical*, or *age lasting*."

We may easily conceive how well qualified these persons will be, from such instructions, to give a reason of the hope that is in them. The most natural conclusion, indeed, is, that they will relinquish all farther researches of this kind, and commence Deists. A revelation founded in mysticism; every where accompanied with insuperable difficulties; replete with contradictions, and terminating in vague conjecture; cannot, without blasphemy, be imputed to that Being who *is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all.*

If there be any thing in your address which betrays greater inattention to the word of truth, than what we have already noticed, it is your application of some passages in the book of Revelation. You quote chap. 21. v. 1—3. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband—And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”—This relates to a period prior to the universal judgment, though subsequent to the conflagration; for between those two events there will be a thousand years of blessedness to the saints, on the *new earth*; who will be raised at the time of the conflagration, and the wicked not till the thousand years shall be finished, when the judgment will commence. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. For this we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up, together with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” 1. Theff. 4. v. 14—17. “But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment,

ment, and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2 Peter, 3. v. 7, 8, 13. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." Isa. 65. v. 17. And 66. v. 22. "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain." "But the rest of the dead lived not again, until the thousand years were finished: this is the first resurrection. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Rev. 20. v. 5. 7. 12. The last two chapters of the Revelations contain a description of the glory and felicity of the church, after the first resurrection, on the earth in its renovated state; but when the awful procedures of the last judgment shall be closed, the saints will be received into other and higher mansions, even *the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*, (Mat. 25. v. 34.) said to be *reserved for them in heaven*. (1 Pet. 1. v. 4.) And what proves to a demonstration, as well the injudicious manner in which you quote Scripture, as the absolute falsehood of the doctrine you wish to establish, is, that in this description, which you apply to the state when all mankind, as well as devils, shall be made holy and happy, we read of *dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and liars*, as being excluded; and upon whom this sentence is said to be pronounced, *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still*. (Rev. 22. v. 11. 15.) You are, it must be confessed, singularly unhappy in the choice of your passages. Not one have you quoted but what either directly militates against the doctrine which it was brought to countenance, or else has no relation whatever to the point in question.

question. Yet we will do you the justice to suppose, they were the best you could produce.

Finding nothing further in your address which is at all material, we shall close the present strictures by observing—

First. That no inferences deduced from the ideas we naturally form of the divine attributes, can be admitted as proof of any specific proposition, which relates to his government in particular instances: (1.) Because our conceptions are totally inadequate to the comprehension of what is absolutely infinite. *None by wisdom can find out God.* (2.) Because different persons will be disposed to draw different conclusions from the same premises, according to the particular systems which they have severally adopted. (3.) Because God having, in his infinite goodness, vouchsafed a revelation of himself in the Scriptures, and of whatever is at all interesting to us in the present state, it is unnecessary for us to have recourse to the mere dictates of reason, in the investigation of important truths. Such an appeal to reason, under these circumstances, would supersede the divine testimony, and render it altogether useless. If reason be sufficient to lead us to the true knowledge of God, what need then of a revelation? And if the revelation be perfect, why recur to a mode of abstract reasoning on the divine attributes, with which, it is confessed, we are but very imperfectly acquainted? If reason be an infallible guide, follow that; but if the Scriptures only be so, follow them.

Secondly. The Scriptures are either perfect or imperfect. If imperfect, they are not to be implicitly regarded; and their divinity may be justly questioned. If perfect, the sincere soul who pays due attention, can neither remain in ignorance, nor be deceived. Ambiguity is a species of imperfection; and it is that kind of imperfection which the Scriptures solemnly and repeatedly disclaim. Nothing can be more ambiguous than to apply the same term uniformly to things which are extremely dissimilar, and without any mark of distinction. For example, to apply the same term to the being of God, to the duration of Christ, and the endless felicity of saints; and at the same time to the misery of the wicked, unless they will each of them be of the same duration, is the excess of ambiguity.

guity. Nor is this ambiguity diminished by explaining the word to signify *hidden*, or *age*, or any thing else; for still the same word, be it what it may, is used to express duration, either endless or limited, just as men's prejudices may happen to bias their judgments. Consequently there is no revelation concerning a future state, either of happiness or misery, as to their duration. And yet to make this known, was the great design of the gospel. If you mean to prove, that wicked men and devils will be liberated out of hell, you must point us to the text where it is expressed in so many words, as plainly as it is said, *their worm never dieth, and their fire shall never be quenched*. Against such evidence your inferences will weigh nothing. Strong language, bold assertions, specious surmise, sophistical reasoning, and even plausible inferences, or the most ingenious constructions, are altogether distinct from plain, direct, and unequivocal proof.

FINIS.

...is this ...
...word is ...
...time word, be it ...
...either ...
...to ...
...concerning a ...
...their ...
...of the ...
...and ...
...the ...
...it is ...
...every ...
...to ...
...and ...

